

# CLEAN WATER AND OUR LOCAL ECONOMY...

## Making the Connection

**Clean water is central to our way of life in Northern Michigan.** It provides delicious drinking water, in addition to opportunities for swimming, boating, fishing, and hunting in our abundant lakes, rivers, and wetlands. One of the best reasons to protect our water is to preserve the benefits people can derive from it -- for our economy, our health, and our enjoyment!

Clean water is why people visit, live and work here. It attracts people to our region, which in turn puts pressure on clean water resources. The more we grow, the more we have to take care that our water remains clean and protected, because our continued economic growth depends on it!

### ABOUT THE WATERSHED COUNCIL STUDIES

Tip of the Mitt Watershed Council is keenly aware of this important connection. We know that you make this connection, too – because you have been telling us! Over the past five years, the Watershed Council has used surveys and focus groups to talk with tourists, residents, business owners, shoreline property owners, and local government officials about the economic importance of clean water.

In 2010-12, we partnered with Michigan State University Extension to do a series of extensive surveys in the Lake Charlevoix Watershed. Three sets of surveys were completed with Watershed residents, shoreline property owners, and local government officials. To build upon that work, in 2013, we did a series of focus groups with local government officials. In 2014, we surveyed beachgoers in four local counties within the Watershed Council's Service Area, and conducted a Literature Review to find existing studies related to the connection between clean water and the local economy. Finally, in 2014-15, we carried out another survey targeting business owners.

Our Literature Review examined the connection between clean water and the local economy by focusing on three points: tourism, property values, and water treatment. We found very little that demonstrated the connection between water treatment and the local economy of this region, so the Literature Review also suggested future study topics to fill the gap. However, it was evident from the Literature Review that studies around the United States and in the Great Lakes region clearly demonstrate that tourism and property values are directly impacted by water quality. Historically, these are two extremely important points for Northern Michigan, creating jobs and benefitting local citizens.

The Literature Review also noted that water quality can be threatened by stormwater runoff and shoreline development. Therefore, in addition to asking people what they know about general water quality, our surveys included questions about managing stormwater and sensible shoreline development.

### WHAT DID WE FIND?

#### Tourists

Visitors in Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Cheboygan Counties answered survey questions at their local beaches. When asked if they agree with this statement: *"If the water quality at this beach were to decline due to bacterial contamination, algae, or other pollution problems, that would affect my decision to come to this beach,"* 76 out of 95 respondents, or 80%, agreed or strongly agreed.

#### Watershed Residents

Landowners throughout the Lake Charlevoix Watershed strongly indicated that they believe their quality of life depends on clean water in local streams, rivers and lakes.

- 89% either agreed or strongly agreed that economic stability depends on clean water
- 92% also agreed or strongly agreed that it is their personal responsibility to help protect water quality
- 75% are willing to change the way they care for their lawn and garden, to improve water quality

When considering if they would be willing to pay a little more to protect water quality (for example, user fees or local taxes), 41% either agreed or strongly agreed; 28% were neutral; and 31% either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

#### Shoreline Property Owners

Shoreline property owners in the Lake Charlevoix Watershed also believe that good water quality is good economics!

- More than 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that quality of life in their community, and economic stability, depend on good water quality.
- 9 of 10 Shoreline Property Owners believe that it is their personal responsibility to help protect water quality
- 3 of 4 are willing to change the way they care for their lawn and garden, to improve water quality

When considering if they would be willing to pay a little more to protect water quality (for example, user fees or local taxes), 42% either agreed or strongly agreed; 30% were neutral; and 29% either disagreed or strongly disagreed

### Business Owners

Business owners in Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Cheboygan Counties participated in a web-based survey.

- Of those who responded, 61% either agreed or strongly agreed that their business relies significantly on tourism, either directly or indirectly
- 94% believe that poor local water quality would negatively affect both property values and tourism
- 50% of business owners believe that their actions have an impact upon the community's water quality

**Stormwater runoff:** 76% of businesses reported that they know where rainwater and snowmelt go when it runs off their business property. This is important for managing stormwater runoff, and many business owners are interested in doing so.

- When asked if they would be willing to change how they manage runoff to protect water quality, 52% responded that they either already use best management practices or are willing to change current practices

**Shoreline development:** Local business owners are also beginning to understand the impact of shoreline development.

- When asked if developed shoreline properties lack the ability to filter out pollutants before they enter a lake or river, generally reducing water quality, 51% of the businesses reported that they agreed or strongly agreed
- Business owners also understand that it is possible to develop shoreline properties and still protect water quality – 83% either agree or strongly agree with that statement

We also asked business owners this question: *“Regarding water quality and protection, I think my local government is doing: too much, too little, about the right amount, or unsure.”* The responses indicate that there is support for local government to be pro-active on water protection efforts:

- Only 5% felt the government was doing too much
- Roughly 35% were unsure
- Another 27% responded that the government is doing too little to protect water quality
- 32% felt the government is doing about the right amount
- 44% noted that they would be willing to pay a little more to protect water quality (for example, user fees or local taxes)

### Local Elected Officials

Local officials, for the most part, see no conflict between economic development and water quality.

- 4 out of 5 responded that both economic stability and quality of life depends on good water quality
- Over 80% also agreed that protecting water quality is the responsibility of local government
- 87% disagreed that it is alright to reduce water quality to promote economic development

They also disagree that taking action to protect water quality is too expensive. They were more ambivalent, however, about who should pay.

- 40% did not generally support increases in local taxes or fees, to improve water quality
- 31% were neutral
- 29% supported increases in local taxes or fees, if needed

## MOVING FORWARD

**What does this all mean?** Making the connection between keeping our water clean and economic growth is critical to our future. There is no single action or entity that can make the difference. Protecting water is a community effort – it takes all of us!

There is broad agreement in our communities that water quality impacts our local economy. Landowners, business owners, and local government officials all believe they have an important responsibility to protect the water.

As noted in the Literature Review, stormwater management is a major concern for local water quality. Our surveys revealed that local business owners are open to learning about how to control it, and are willing to change what they do now, if it better protects water quality. Landowners are also willing to change how they manage their lawn and garden to improve water quality.

Also noted in the Literature Review, shoreline development can have a negative impact on water quality. Hardened shorelines displace natural features that work to filter out pollutants, before they enter the water. However, there are techniques that can mitigate these impacts. According to our results, business owners, landowners, and local government officials have all expressed interest in learning more about them.

Additionally, local governments expressed concern regarding who should pay for water protection efforts. However, local businesses indicate that they are willing to pay a little more to protect water, if needed, and also support their local government taking steps to address water protection issues.

*If we work together, we can keep our water clean and our economy growing... making the connection!!*



426 Bay Street, Petoskey MI 49770  
Phone: (231) 347-1181

[www.WatershedCouncil.org](http://www.WatershedCouncil.org)